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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000374

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TAGS: PGOV PREL XW IT

SUBJECT: ITALY AGREES ON SOMALIA, REQUESTS USG CONTACT ON HORN ISSUES

REF: A. STATE 14531
1B. USEU TODAY 01/05/2006
1C. ROME 117

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Anna Borg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. MFA Director General for Sub-Saharan Africa Armando Sanguini February 1 expressed his complete agreement with Reftel A points urging support for a meeting of Somalia's parliament, and briefed DCM Anna Borg on his recent trip to Asmara. Sanguini suggested more regular contact between Italy and the United States, perhaps at the A/S or DAS level, on Somalia and other Horn issues to exchange views and expertise. Noting that Italy was not invited to a December Darfur contact group meeting in London, Sanguini requested U.S. assistance in obtaining a seat for Italy at the March gathering. End summary.

Somalia

¶2. (C) DCM delivered Reftel A points in a February 1 meeting with DG Sanguini and encouraged Italy to use its influence with Gedi to urge his cooperation in convening a session of parliament in Baidoa. Sanguini expressed his complete agreement with our views and commented that the last point also could be applied to countries from outside the region, which should also refrain from activities that would give the perception of external pressures on the process. With Baidoa entering the picture, Sanguini noted that Italy would need to take care in determining how to parcel aid out among the various regions in Somalia.

¶3. (C) Gedi had been a calming force within Somalia, according to Sanguini, but had begun to be a problem recently. Sanguini pointed out Gedi's relative lack of power compared to the president and speaker, since the prime minister is appointed by the president, and noted that President Yusuf seemed very determined to successfully convene a session of parliament. Sanguini said the message to Gedi is not to become irresponsible now. Although Italy had believed Gedi would eventually be able convene a session of parliament, and he had received the GOI's support, Sanguini said it looked like Hassan would be the one to finally make that happen. He noted that Italy would continue

to try to be supportive of Gedi, especially given the impression he left in Rome after a fall visit where he delivered what Sanguini termed a message of inclusiveness.

¶ 14. (C) Touching on the danger of Islamic radicalization in Somalia, Sanguini pointed to the fact that most aid in Somalia came through Muslim charities. He noted that this was beneficial for Somalis when aid was given out of humanitarian consideration, but he expressed concern that some of the assistance was a radicalizing influence on Islam in Somalia. Sanguini wondered whether it would be possible for Western involvement with the Muslim community to counterbalance this influence and noted the need for positive engagement. He noted that the United States seemed to be turning its attention to Somalia and put forth the possibility of regular contact between U.S. and GOI officials.

Eritrea and Ethiopia

¶ 15. (C) DCM affirmed U.S. commitment to finding a sustainable solution to the Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute, including demarcation of the border in accordance with the Ethiopia Eritrea Border Commission decision, and support for a meeting of the Witnesses to the Algiers Accord. Italy is very supportive of the U.S. initiative on Ethiopia and Eritrea, according to Sanguini, and hopes that the effort brings some results. Sanguini noted that he had met with Amb. DeLisi in Asmara and had expressed Italy's willingness to collaborate with the United States on the Ethiopia-Eritrea demarcation issue. Sanguini noted that the Eritreans conflated the UN position on Eritrean independence with the UN role in the

ROME 00000374 002 OF 002

border demarcation, and that the international community was generally not seen as a friend in Asmara. He said that the Eritrean government considers the international community to be "guilty of neutrality".

¶ 16. (C) Judging President Afwerki's mood as calm and confident, but tough, Sanguini suggested that if Afwerki were to take a step forward, it could open possibilities as President Meles might be able to see a positive result in it for himself. Sanguini also remarked that Eritrea seems to prefer bilateral initiatives to multilateralism--big organizations tended to put the small country on the defensive. Questioning the utility of an Algiers Witnesses meeting, Sanguini said that Ethiopia would have to make a step forward, even if it's a small one. He noted that the Eritreans were right about Ethiopia's stance on demarcation.

Sudan

¶ 17. (C) As one of five Western members of the Sudan Evaluation and Assessment Commission (EAC), Italy believed it should have been invited to the December informal Darfur contact group meeting in London. Sanguini pointed out that Italy had many good contacts on Darfur and that the GOI was disturbed to have been left out of the group. When Italy approached the UK, they were told that the aim was to keep the group small. Sanguini noted that the UK, United States, France, Netherlands, Finland, African Union, and UN were all represented and that Italy felt it should be part of the group. Sanguini requested our help in pressing the UK to invite the GOI to a follow-up meeting to be held in London in March.

¶ 18. (C) Sanguini also noted that the current AU presence in Darfur was a very small force and that it would take enormous troop strength to effectively manage an area the size of Darfur. He wondered why SRSG Pronk does not attend EAC meetings, given their importance.

Consultation

¶9. (C) Sanguini strongly emphasized the importance of periodic GOI exchanges with the United States on Sub-Saharan Africa, especially Horn of Africa issues. Noting Italy's experience and expertise in the Horn, he proposed an A/S or DAS-level meeting twice a year in Washington, Rome, or an African capital, to maintain a dialogue on Somalia, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Sudan, and other topics of mutual interest.

Sanguini added that it would also be worthwhile to discuss issues in the greater context of the Horn, with all of its complex linkages.

Comment

¶10. (C) Italy sees itself as a major player in Horn of Africa issues, actively seeking to influence EU policy (Ref B) and regularly sending officials like Sanguini and Undersecretary Alfredo Mantica to the region (Reftel C). The GOI also appears to be genuinely interested in engaging regularly with us, especially on Somalia. End Comment.

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